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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 002034

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MARJORIE COPSON

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/31/2009
TAGS: ELAB ECON PGOV EAID ZI ZANU PF MDC ZCTU
SUBJECT: ZCTU HEAD: OPPOSITION NEEDS BETTER ORGANIZATION

REF: A. A) HARARE 01624
 B. B) PRETORIA 5369

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher W. Dell for reason 1.5 d

¶11. (C) Summary: Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU)
Secretary General Wellington Chibebe told the Ambassador on

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December 13 that the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) and civil society in general had to organize better to win what was now likely to be a long-term struggle to democratize Zimbabwe. The ZCTU was already doing so, especially through its & rural strategy8 of organizing agricultural workers. He agreed that the GOZ decision to expel Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) representatives in October had been a mistake and confirmed that COSATU was coming again in late January. End Summary.

COSATU Blunder

¶12. (C) The Ambassador noted that during his recent visit to South Africa, Muthelezi Mbeki had told him (Ref B) that the GOZ decision to expel the COSATU representatives in October had been the regime's biggest mistake to date during Zimbabwe's political crisis. Mbeki had said that 14 million South Africans, COSATU's 2 million members and their families, were now questioning GOZ policies. Chibebe agreed and noted that COSATU was planning to send representatives again in late January. He said he had heard from various sources that the GOZ had been dumfounded by the unwillingness and inability of the South African government to intervene against COSATU.

¶13. (C) The Ambassador told Chibebe we wanted to hold a ceremony honoring him for winning the Meany award. Chibebe said after mid-January and agreed with our suggestion to hold the ceremony in conjunction with the COSATU visit as a way to raise the profile of both events.

ZCTU Rural Strategy; Elections

¶14. (C) The Ambassador asked how the ZCTU's strategy of organizing rural workers was proceeding (Ref A). Chibebe said the ZCTU had helped organize 1.2 million agricultural workers, most in the informal sector. They would establish their own union on December 17. These workers were not yet part of ZCTU and were not paying dues. At some point in the future, they would have to decide what sort of union they wanted and its affiliation to ZCTU. However, for now ZCTU's had achieved its initial goal; the process of weakening the ZANU-PF hold over the countryside had started.

¶15. (C) The Ambassador said that during his South African visit, he had also become convinced of the need for the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) and the rest of Zimbabwe's democratic opposition to better organize for the long-term. The MDC had nearly won power in 2000 and 2002, but ZANU-PF had recovered and the MDC had to gear itself for a struggle that could take years.

¶16. (C) Chibebe agreed, noting that the MDC had arisen out of the labor movement, but that many members had only joined the party in the weeks before the 2000 election and then suddenly found themselves in Parliament. For too many in the MDC the struggle was now to win elections, not to democratize Zimbabwe. The opposition in general had too many & officers8 and lacked foot soldiers willing to do the dirty work. & Prayer8 was not enough, the opposition needed to take action. For its part, according to Chibebe, the ZCTU was already organizing for the long run, as evidenced by its rural strategy.

¶17. (C) That said, Chibebe said he had no doubt that the ZANU-PF would lose a truly free and fair election: the party and its policies were simply too unpopular. In response to a

suggestion from the Ambassador, Chibebbe said the ZCTU would be willing to play informal host to regional labor observers in Zimbabwe to come in the months before the vote so they could provide their own independent report on conditions in Zimbabwe before and during the campaign.

Comment

18. (C) Chibebbe's ZCTU is one of the key civil society institutions that we need to nurture and support. They are capable of mobilizing thousands and of putting real pressure on the regime. Chibebbe himself seems to understand better than many of his MDC colleagues the importance of a strong organization. Moreover, labor unions are not specifically targeted by the new NGO law and may prove an important conduit of support to civil society at large. End Comment.
DELL